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ABSTRACT

This document provides basic information about the Statewide Student Assessment System in New Mexico. There are four components of the Statewide Student Assessment System that are guided by the State Department of Education. Each component serves a specific purpose and targets specific grade levels. The purpose of the reading assessment of grades 1 and 2 is to determine reading proficiency. Each local school district determines the methods of assessing students' progress in reading in these grades. The second component, the New Mexico Achievement Assessment Program, is administered to all students in grades 3 through 9 in the content areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The norm-referenced test used for this purpose is the CTBS5/TerraNova Survey Plus with a custom supplement test booklet for New Mexico. Together, these tests provide performance-level data about student progress toward the state's standards. The New Mexico Writing Assessment Program is a direct, on-demand assessment for student in grades 4 and 6. Districts have the option of using a version of this assessment for grade 8. The New Mexico High School Competency Examination is a criterion-referenced test. Passing this examination is a requirement for public high school students in New Mexico. Some information is also provided about exemptions from the testing program, test security, and using test results. (SLD)

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HANDBOOK

STATEWIDE STUDENT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

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INFORMATION FOR PARENTS, STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER SCHOOL PERSONNEL

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STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

NEW MEXICO
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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HANDBOOK

STATEWIDE STUDENT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS, STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER SCHOOL PERSONNEL

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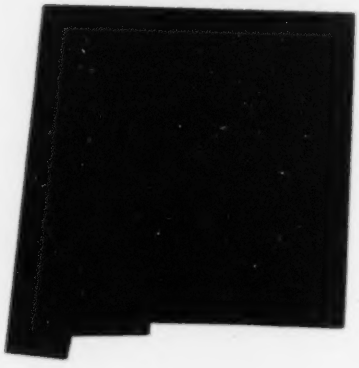
VISION STATEMENT

The New Mexico State Department of Education believes the education of *all* students must become the mission of *all* New Mexicans. We believe education must challenge *all* students to reach their potential.

MESSAGE FROM STATE SUPERINTENDENT

Knowing what learning is expected is important for students, parents and teachers. New Mexico's effort to set clear learning standards has been exemplary. Our standards are supported by an assessment system that measures progress toward our goals for all children. This handbook is offered to share information about assessment, an essential element of New Mexico's system of accountability for public education. Our public schools are on course to excellence, and quality assessment will keep us on track.

MICHAEL J. DAVIS



INTRODUCTION

The reasons for testing and assessing student progress and program success are numerous. The methods used are just as great and varied as the purposes for testing. This document is intended to provide some very basic information about the Statewide Student Assessment System. The State Department of Education is charged by the State Board of Education, and, in turn, by the New Mexico Legislature, with certain responsibilities regarding testing public school students. It is the hope of the Department that the information provided herein will help answer often-asked questions.

CONTENT STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS

According to New Mexico State Board of Education regulations, "content standard" means a broad description of the knowledge and skills students should acquire in a particular subject area. "Benchmark" means a statement of what all students should know and be able to do in a content area by the end of designated grades or levels.

Standards for Excellence, the regulatory document for New Mexico public schools, requires knowledge and skills to be assessed and evaluated through the performance of Content Standards with Benchmarks, the Statewide Student Assessment System, and local measures.

OVERVIEW
STATEWIDE STUDENT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

There are four components of the Statewide Student Assessment System that are guided by the State Department of Education. Each component serves a different purpose and targets specific grade levels.

READING ASSESSMENT AT GRADES ONE AND TWO

The purpose of grades one and two reading assessment is to determine reading proficiency. Each local school district determines the method(s) of assessing student progress in reading. During the school year, teachers collect data, then prepare a class report of progress in the spring, utilizing data aggregation forms provided by the Assessment and Evaluation Unit. The classroom data showing the various levels of reading proficiency are then compiled at the building (school) level and reported to the district office. The local district test coordinator then tallies the results from each building and sends a district report to the Assessment and Evaluation Unit at the State Department of Education at the end of the school year. Parents are entitled to their childrens' results of these assessments.

NEW MEXICO ACHIEVEMENT ASSESSMENT PROGRAM AT GRADES THREE THROUGH NINE

The New Mexico Achievement Assessment Program is administered to all students in grades three through nine in the content areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The norm-referenced test that is used for this purpose is the CTBS5/*TerraNova* Survey Plus. A custom supplement test booklet accompanies this exam in order to assess student progress toward New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks. Together, both tests provide performance-level data showing student progress toward these same standards. The results of the achievement assessment are used for accountability purposes and programmatic decisions. In reporting the norm-referenced score results, median percentiles are utilized (a median is defined as the middle score).

The median national percentile is 50. By looking at the reported scores for the norm-referenced portion of the test, the reader is able to determine how far above or below the national median a particular student, class, school or district has scored.

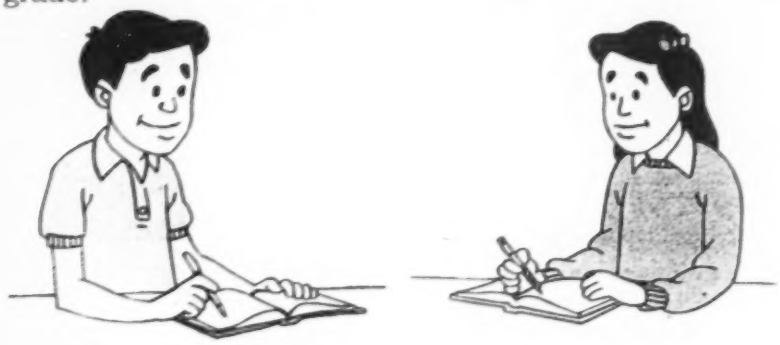
When reporting the performance-level summary data, student scores are aggregated into four levels of proficiency: (1) beginning step, (2) nearing proficiency, (3) proficient, and (4) advanced. These levels show how well students perform on the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks.

NEW MEXICO WRITING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The New Mexico Writing Assessment Program is a direct, on-demand assessment. All students in grades 4 and 6 participate in the Writing Assessment. Students spend approximately one hour a day over a three-day period writing and revising their compositions. On the first day the students receive the writing prompt for the appropriate grade level and a pre-writing checklist. They are instructed to spend several minutes working with pre-writing activities and then are instructed to write a rough draft of their composition. On the second day students receive a guide for revisions and are instructed to use the guide to help them think about how to improve their writing and to revise their rough drafts as necessary.

On the third day the students make last-minute changes and transcribe their essays into a final composition booklet. The composition is scored on a six-point scale (six being high) using a set of criteria that measures a student's ability to communicate in a particular mode of discourse. Analytic scores are also provided for each student's paper in the areas of sentence formation, mechanics, word usage, and development. Although not mandated for the eighth grade, districts have the option of using this assessment tool for their eighth grade students. This provides an additional checkpoint for students before they are required to pass the written composition of the New Mexico High School Competency Examination, first administered at grade ten.

The writing prompts (topics) for each grade level are in the following modes of discourse: narrative mode for fourth grade; expository mode for sixth grade; and, persuasive mode for eighth grade.



NEW MEXICO HIGH SCHOOL COMPETENCY EXAMINATION

The New Mexico High School Competency Examination is a criterion-referenced test, which means a student must attain a particular score on each sub-test in order to pass. Passing the examination is a graduation requirement for public high school students in New Mexico. The examination assesses competencies in the content areas of reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, and each student must also write a persuasive essay.

Students take the test for the first time in the tenth grade and must pass all six sub-tests in order to receive a high school diploma. Sophomores who fail any part of the examination have another chance in their junior year and two chances in their senior year to successfully complete all six sub-tests before graduation deadlines. Seniors who do not pass the examination but fulfill the other course and credit requirements are given the option of exiting with a certificate of completion (or "attendance") or returning within the next five years to retake the examination, pass it, and receive a diploma. A student may receive an exemption, waiver, or modification to the examination based on bilingual education or special education program guidelines.

DOES EVERYONE HAVE TO TEST?

The Statewide Student Assessment System is designed to assist educators in making appropriate decisions about district curricula and delivery of instruction within classrooms. The State Department of Education staff, teachers and administrators all work together to provide the best possible circumstances for the assessment system. There are statutory and regulatory requirements for each component that are to be considered for students receiving special services. Students needing to take any of the mandated assessments under modified conditions must have those modifications specified in each student's IEP.

Regarding language proficiency, it is recommended that a student take the mandated, statewide assessments during the same administrations as all other students or be exempted entirely from that test due to oral language proficiency measurements as determined by a State-approved language assessment. If a student is exempted, the school must administer a norm-referenced or performance-based assessment in the student's home language.

If a student misses one or more days during the administration of a particular statewide, mandated assessment, it is incumbent upon the school and school district to make sure that the student finishes the administration of that test during another established time prior to the end of the testing window.

TEST SECURITY

In order to maintain the validity of the statewide assessments, the security of test items and test materials is an absolute and critical must. Several measures are required to preserve the security of these tests. All school personnel are charged with the following guidelines in order to preserve the integrity of the testing program:

1. Mandated, statewide assessment materials:
   (a) are secure materials, so it is essential not to provide an opportunity for any student to have access to the tests and thus have an advantage over other students prior to the administration of the tests;
   (b) may not be photocopied or reproduced in any fashion, including paraphrasing. To do so is in violation of copyright laws; and,
   (c) these same test materials may not be provided to any persons except those conducting the testing and those being tested.

2. Test items may not be taught in part or in whole, or exposed in any other way, to students prior to, during, or after testing.

3. The answers to test items may not be provided to students in writing, orally, or in any other fashion.

4. Materials must be held secure before and after testing and utilized appropriately during testing.

5. Test materials should not leave the testing site, or school building, until they have been prepared for return to the scoring contractor.

USING TEST RESULTS

Only when the individual and group reports of achievement are used by those educators making decisions about program, curriculum, instruction, and practice, can the tests be considered as tools to improving education and opportunity. It is important for educators to spend time reviewing the results and using them to inform decisions and policy. Students and parents also have the right to expect the results to be explained to them, as well as how the reports will be used to improve educational opportunities for their children.